

# Literacy Plans for Kentucky Schools

A KDE & KRA Position Statement





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KRA Website

<http://www.kyreading.org/>

KDE Website

<http://www.education.ky.gov/KDE/>

KY Adolescent Literacy Plan and Joint Position Statement on Adolescent Literacy

<http://www.education.ky.gov/KDE/Instructional+Resources/Literacy/Kentucky+Adolescent+Literacy+Plan.htm>

Prepared by

Robin Hebert, KDE & KRA

# Executive Summary

Kentucky's educational system has made strides toward achieving the goal of literacy proficiency for all students by 2014. To continue such strides and to accelerate our work, we must carefully consider the implementation of initiatives and requirements that will support students, teachers, schools and districts. Linking instruction to 21st-century literacy skills is one way of improving our pace. Fittingly:

**Defining a School-Wide Literacy Plan** establishes the needs for a common understanding of literacy — one with a focus on academic learning and student performance, where students utilize reading, writing, speaking and presenting, and critical thinking skills to learn content.

**Level of Concern** reveals the importance of improving the literacy levels of Kentucky's students and presents national and state statistics showing the number of at-risk students without the basic 21st-century learning and thinking skills necessary to achieve success beyond high school; provides a chart detailing results of Kentucky students falling below proficiency levels; and provides research supporting systematic and consistent instruction in literacy to improve the deficiency of Kentucky's students.

**College and/or Career Readiness** emphasizes the importance of students being prepared for the demands of 21st-century citizenship and employment and provides details about the advanced academic and literacy demands needed in the fastest growing professions.

**Goals of Literacy Planning** summarizes findings by the Kentucky Literacy Partnership for the *Conditions of Literacy Success* and describes high-performing schools as schools that emphasize effective literacy instruction across content areas and low-performing schools as schools without a systematic emphasis on student achievement in literacy.

**Instructional and Leadership Capacity** highlights the need for capacity building to bring about change. Collaborative learning and cultures of learning are essential elements for sustaining measurable literacy achievement. During times of change, instructional leaders provide the structure to ensure the vision of literacy attainment for all students.

**Sustain continuous improvements in literacy** involves concentrated literacy efforts as a priority for all stakeholders and discusses the importance of ongoing learning by teachers and instructional leaders. Again, there is an emphasis on leadership practices being key for successful implementation and sustainability.

**Identify policies and practices to improve the literacy of the Commonwealth's children** details the importance of sharing a common vision, intense intellectual climate controlled by individuals within school, a focus on high-quality instruction, specific protocols for analyzing instruction, transparency of practice and results, and coaching and support to teachers.

**District and State Roles** underscores literacy as an ongoing, lifelong goal. Districts should model and support but avoid a top down approach. Districts should understand literacy in all content areas is a priority to student preparation for life after college, must start at birth before children enter kindergarten and work collaboratively with community partners.

The state can establish a model literacy plan; support professional development, materials and interventions related to literacy instruction; and align its plan with a national literacy plan while working to ensure effective school reform with a specific, targeted approach — literacy.

**Recommendation** includes a call for action for Kentucky to move toward state-required policies for literacy teams and literacy plans in all schools. Kentucky's goal must be to ensure that all students in the Commonwealth achieve high levels of literacy to be successful in life.



# Literacy Plans for Kentucky Schools

## Introduction

In April 2007, Kentucky joined a 10-state Adolescent Literacy Network and received an adolescent literacy grant from the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) to support the development of plans for a statewide adolescent literacy plan. In September 2007, the KDE, the Kentucky Reading Association (KRA) and the Kentucky Board of Education (KBE) held an adolescent literacy forum in Lexington, Kentucky, at which ideas for a comprehensive literacy plan for grades 4-12 were developed. Later, the KBE, KRA and KDE collaborated to form Kentucky's Adolescent Literacy Task Force, whose purpose was to create a plan for addressing the literacy needs of Kentucky's students. In response to this document, the Kentucky legislature introduced a joint resolution in 2008 requesting a statewide literacy plan. In August 2008, the Kentucky Department of Education and the Kentucky Reading Association published *Improving Adolescent Literacy in Kentucky: A Joint Position Statement*, which recommended, among other goals, that every school in Kentucky be required to develop its own literacy plan. Progress toward this aim has been delayed, but not forgotten. With the passage of KRS158.6453 (Senate Bill 1) (2009), with heavy emphasis on literacy development and more cohesive coordination of school-wide writing, it is our belief that this season is a unique opportunity for schools in Kentucky to develop school-wide literacy plans, one component of which would be the school-wide writing plan.

## Defining a School-wide Literacy Plan

Literacy is the “foundation upon which academic learning and successful student performance depends” (Meltzer & Ziemba, 2006). Literate students are ones who know how to use reading, writing, listening and viewing, speaking and presenting, and critical thinking skills “to learn content ... [to] use those skills to communicate what he or she has learned ... [and to] transfer that learning to other situations” (Meltzer & Ziemba, 2006). In order for schools to develop students who are literate, improvement must be a continuous goal led by the principal and a literacy leadership team. “Expertise in literacy is most beneficial when held collectively by the entire school community” (Irvin, Meltzer & Dukes, 2007). But expertise is not enough; schools must improve their ability to close the gap between knowledge and practice. We know that when a focus on systemic development of literacy exists, all aspects of “school” are affected by this shift, including “curriculum, instruction, assessment, policies and structures, resource allocation, teacher professional development, and school culture” (Irvin, Meltzer & Dukes, 2007). Many savvy principals and school leaders have already begun to use this focus on literacy as a lever for school improvement.



The purposes outlined in the current Title I document, *Improving Student Literacy: to establish a comprehensive literacy program* (2009), include:

- establishing a comprehensive, effective national literacy program;
- providing federal support to states to develop, coordinate and implement comprehensive literacy plans;
- supporting comprehensive (early childhood through grade 12) literacy programs;
- providing students of all ages with literacy-rich environments and high-quality, research-based instruction;
- providing explicit and systematic instruction in literacy across the curriculum;
- providing excellence in teacher preparation and professional development;
- selecting high-quality diagnostic assessments and instructional materials;
- and promoting coordination of efforts among key educational and community stakeholders, i.e. schools, early literacy programs, family literacy programs, afterschool programs.

These are the very areas a school's literacy team and faculty would address in a school-wide literacy plan. Research shows that schools making gains in student achievement share two common structures: a data-based plan that includes intensive help and support for struggling students and high expectations for content-area literacy instruction. Irvin, Meltzer and Dukes (2007) describe the essential components of a literacy plan this way:

- Strengthening Literacy Development Across the Content Areas
- Literacy Interventions for Struggling Readers and Writers
- School Policies, Structures and Culture for Supporting Literacy
- Building Leadership Capacity
- Supporting Teachers to Improve Instruction

Consistent, unrelenting focus on student learning is key to successful implementation of literacy improvement (Bedenbaugh, et. al., 2007). This is the essence of what a school-wide literacy plan does. It articulates the shared student achievement goals of the literacy team and school staff; the processes and people involved; how data is used; how time, technology and personnel are allocated in support of literacy



instruction; how school structures and policies will efficiently provide access to teacher professional development; and how progress toward literacy goals will be measured (Meltzer & Ziemba, 2006; Bedenbaugh, et. al., 2007).

David Conley (2007) of the Education Policy Improvement Center put it this way: “The most important thing a . . . school can do is create a culture focused on intellectual development of all students.” Research shows that in successful schools, faculty questions its own existing practice, rather than blames lack of student achievement on “external causes” (Glickman, 2002). With literacy planning, school leaders and literacy teams are able to help teachers broaden their thinking about literacy and share ownership of the change initiatives (Meltzer & Ziemba, 2006). In the *Florida Literacy and Reading Excellence Professional Paper: The Literacy Leadership Team*, Bedenbaugh and others (2007) describe why literacy leadership teams bring successful change: “Change takes time, planning, and commitment. Literacy leadership teams can take many forms, but essential members include the principal, reading and library/media specialists, literacy coach, counselor, content-area teachers representing different departments, and resource teachers . . . who work with students across multiple grade levels” (Irvin, Meltzer & Ziemba, 2007).

In order for the plan of action to be successful school wide, every teacher must commit to the plan and be willing to make whatever changes are necessary. . . Collaboration offers expanded influence of the literacy leadership team as a “problem-solving entity” (Irvin, Meltzer & Ziemba, 2007). School leaders must obtain broad “buy-in” for the plan – “it should not be developed by a small group of people and kept secret” (Irvin, Meltzer & Dukes, 2007). Then, the literacy team and the literacy plan offer encouragement and support to teachers so they feel comfortable trying new strategies and persevering when they are initially unsuccessful or challenged.



For example, the literacy team and plan provide resources, programs and structures to support struggling students, and teachers know about these and how to successfully access them (Meltzer & Ziemba, 2006).

Of course, the biggest obstacle to effective literacy plan implementation is the concern that it will not actually guide action; Mike Schmoker (2006) says this tendency occurs when the plan does not “focus exclusively and directly on curriculum implementation and improving instruction.” Unlike other school improvement documents, literacy plans become the vehicle to evaluate how schools do business and guide the daily, semester-long and annual decisions that are made because they involve everyone in a school. A literacy leadership team is a management tool for simultaneously supporting learning and teaching for the ENTIRE community – students, teachers, educational leaders; enhancing literacy environment; and building a literacy culture through collegiality and collaboration (Bedenbaugh, et. al., 2007). This collaborative process facilitates the development of school-wide priorities with the potential to bring about positive changes that directly address the individual school’s concerns.

According to *Job Skills in Today’s Workforce*, the top skills today’s employers are looking for include the ability to research, logical thinking, technology literacy, communications skills, organizational skills, interpersonal skills and professional growth (Bond, 2009).

## Level of Concern

What does the literacy attainment level of Kentucky’s students have to do with high dropout rates, low test scores, frustrated teachers and students, and disappointed employers? Just about everything. According to *Job Skills in Today’s Workforce*, the top skills today’s employers are looking for include the ability to research, logical thinking, technology literacy, communications skills, organizational skills, interpersonal skills and professional growth (Bond, 2009). Kentucky’s students are leaving school unprepared for college, work and the many long- and short-term pursuits of adult life, such as successfully attending college, obtaining and

maintaining fulfilling employment and participating actively as a responsible citizen of the state. Consider the following national statistics:

- 31 percent of 8th and 12th graders meet “proficiency” for their grade level (Alliance, 2006).
- 15 percent of low-income 8th graders read at a proficient level (Alliance, 2006).
- One-half of the incoming 9th graders in a representative urban school with high rates of poverty read at a 6th- or 7th-grade level (Alliance, 2006).
- 3 percent of 8th graders are considered advanced readers (Alliance, 2006).
- 23 percent of high school graduates lack the writing skills necessary to succeed in introductory college writing courses (Alliance, 2006).
- 40 percent of graduates do not have literacy skills employers seek (Alliance, 2006).
- In recent years, U.S. businesses have invested a staggering “\$3 billion to provide basic writing classes to their employees (College Board, 2004)” (Irvin, Meltzer & Dukes, 2007).
- A “substantial percentage” of students need remediation in reading and writing when they go to college (Irvin, Meltzer & Dukes, 2007).
- Approximately eight million middle and high school students read below grade level (Alliance, 2006).
- Between 1971 and 2004, the reading levels of America’s 17-year-olds showed no improvement at all (Title I, 2009).
- 70 percent of 8th graders read below the proficient level on the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress (Title I, 2009).
- 71 percent of high school students graduate on time with a diploma (Title I, 2009).
- Every year, 1,230,000 students fail to graduate and cost the nation more than \$319 billion in lost wages, taxes and productivity over their lifetimes (Title I, 2009).
- The 25 fastest-growing professions have far greater than average literacy demands while the fastest-declining professions have lower than average literacy demands (Title I, 2009).
- The number of at-risk students is higher than eight million when we consider the literacy habits and abilities students need to meet the 21st-century world: “core subject knowledge, 21st-century content, learning and thinking skills, information and communications technology, and life skills” (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2004).

How are Kentucky students faring? Of Kentucky's 1,157 public schools, 60.2 percent made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in the 2008-09 school year, down from 72.9 percent of schools in 2007-08 (Kentucky Department of Education, *News Release*, 2009). Of Kentucky's 175 school districts, 49.9 percent made AYP. Although a rise in reading and mathematics goals (7.74 points and 10.09 points, respectively) likely contributed to a lower percentage of schools making AYP, how are our students really doing in reading, math, science, social studies and writing?

Percentage of Students Scoring at Proficient/Distinguished - KCCT	2007	2008	2009	+/- '07-'09	AVG +/- PER YEAR
<b>Reading</b>					
Elementary	72.72	72.65	73.54	+ .82	+ .27
Middle School	66.32	66.81	66.92	+ .60	+ .20
High School	60.15	60.01	61.84	+1.69	+ .46
<b>Mathematics</b>					
Elementary	61.71	69.52	70.27	+8.56	+2.85
Middle School	51.85	56.96	60.92	+9.07	+3.02
High School	39.30	38.53	41.19	+1.89	+ .63
<b>Science</b>					
Elementary	66.15	68.94	69.98	+3.83	+1.28
Middle School	55.95	59.57	62.72	+6.77	+2.56
High School	41.65	41.28	41.22	-.43	-.14
<b>Social Studies</b>					
Elementary	61.60	59.68	61.11	-.49	-.16
Middle School	52.64	57.82	55.80	+3.16	+1.05
High School	43.74	38.42	40.68	-3.06	-1.02
<b>Writing On Demand</b>					
Elementary	53.37	52.62	55.37	+2.0	+ .67
Middle School	41.92	39.48	42.06	+ .14	+ .05
High School	19.79	29.73	34.97	+15.18	+5.06

(Kentucky Department of Education, "News Release," 2009)

Although the chart reflects positive gains in most years over the past three years, the performance of Kentucky's students reflects national trends: too many of our students are below proficient, and our progress is too slow toward the goal of proficiency for all. "Between 1971 and 2004, the reading levels of America's 17-year-olds showed no improvement at all" (Title I, 1009). In the last three years in Kentucky, high school growth in reading averaged less than 0.5 percent each year. The indicators for Kentucky's at-risk populations are even more grim. In 2009, 49 percent of Kentucky's high school students receiving free/reduced-price meals scored below proficient in reading; 56 percent of Kentucky's African-American high school students were below proficient in reading; and 72 percent of the state's high school students with limited English proficiency scored below proficient in reading (Kentucky Department of Education, "Interim Performance Report," 2009).

In recent years, gains have been made in getting young children off to a good start; "however, it is a serious mistake to assume that a good start is sufficient for producing competent readers [writers, and thinkers]. The ability to comprehend a variety of texts, to use sophisticated comprehension and study strategies, to read critically, and to develop a lifelong desire to read is not acquired entirely during the early years. A good start is critical, but not sufficient" (National Middle School Association, 2001). Research shows that secondary schools have fundamentally neglected specific instruction in literacy. It would seem ludicrous to stop teaching mathematics after the elementary grades, yet students in grades 5 and beyond have not received "systematic or consistent" instruction in literacy.

According to Irvin, Meltzer & Dukes (2007), this deficiency exists because:

- Decision makers do not understand the complex nature of literacy learning.
- Secondary teachers are not trained to support students' literacy development.
- Resources have been put into early literacy reform efforts to the neglect of adolescent literacy.
- Literacy demands are higher than ever before. (Irvin, Meltzer & Dukes, 2007).

Furthermore, a gap exists between what we test and what we teach. “Well meaning teachers discouraged by students who cannot, do not, or will not read actually enable their resistant readers to read less, exacerbating the problem (Schoenbach, Greenleaf, Cziko, & Hurwitz, 1999). By receiving the content through other means such as hands-on projects, videos, and lectures, students may learn the content but be unable to go on to learn more on their own; they become more dependent on the teacher to feed facts, concepts and generalizations to them because they have not learned the skills required to access, evaluate, and synthesize information themselves” (Irvin, Meltzer, & Dukes, 2007). Through school-wide literacy planning, the well-meaning teachers who have inadvertently diminished literacy skills in the past can receive collaborative instructional support and training to promote literacy in their content areas.

Although consensus exists about specific steps which improve literacy instruction, significant and continuous large-scale gains are not being made in this area (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004). An understanding of the complexity of literacy development and the interconnections between literacy and content-area

learning is needed in order for students to develop the academic skills they need to be successful in school and in life (Irvin, Meltzer & Dukes, 2007). Unfortunately, many stakeholders equate “literacy” with basic skills in reading; this definition of literacy must be broadened (Meltzer & Ziemba, 2006), and efforts must focus on sustaining high levels of literacy and learning for current and future students (Irvin, Meltzer & Dukes, 2007). “Since good literacy skills are the foundation of success in every subject, effort must be focused on improving literacy” (Deshler & Kennedy, 2009).

One major obstacle to increased literacy learning is reforming current teacher practice. For optimum literacy development, Mike Schmoker (2006) argues for “generous amounts of close purposeful reading, rereading, writing, and talking” as the essence of authentic literacy. “These simple activities are the foundation for a trained, powerful mind – and a promising future. They are the way up and out – out of boredom, poverty, and intellectual inadequacy. And they’re the ticket to ensuring that record numbers of minority and disadvantaged youngsters attend and graduate from college” (Schmoker, 2006). Evidence reveals what should be going on in schools; literacy planning empowers schools to address the missing pieces on an individualized basis and develop a shared plan for continuous, sustained implementation.

Without doubt, the literacy demands on today’s students

are increasingly complex (Irvin, Meltzer & Dukes, 2007). Many teachers do not feel adequately trained and prepared to address the increasing literacy demands. Moreover, research shows that they do not have sufficient supports within their schools for developing these instructional skills.



“If, as a teacher,

- I present the same lessons in the same manner that I have used in the past;
  - I seek no feedback from my students;
  - I do not analyze and evaluate their work in a manner that changes my own emphasis, repertoire, and timing;
  - I do not visit or observe other adults as they teach;
  - I do not share the work of my students with colleagues for feedback, suggestions, and critiques;
  - I do not visit other schools or attend particular workshops or seminars or read professional literature on aspects of my teaching;
  - I do not welcome visitors with experience and expertise to observe and provide feedback to me on my classroom practice;
  - I have no yearly individualized professional development plan focused on classroom changes to improve student learning; and finally,
  - I have no systemic evaluation of my teaching tied to individual, grade/department, and schoolwide goals,
- Then I have absolutely no way to become better as a teacher” (Glickman, 2002).

Few schools and districts have structures in place to provide these opportunities. “Fewer than 10 percent of middle and high schools have literacy specialists in their buildings to work with students and other teachers in any capacity” (Southern Regional Education Board, 2002). The lack of literacy expertise in most middle schools and high schools severely limits efforts toward improved academic literacy skills for students (Irvin, Meltzer & Dukes, 2007). To quote Louisa Moats, “Teaching reading IS rocket science” (Boulden, 2003). In 1999, the National Reading Panel found that teaching reading comprehension strategies to students at all grade levels is complex (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). Teachers must have a firm grasp of the content, but also must have substantial knowledge of literacy strategies and their effective and appropriate classroom use. Obviously, improved instruction in individual classrooms makes a difference in isolation, but this change is not sufficient or sustainable: “never send a changed individual into an unchanged culture” (Fullan, et. al, 2001). Teachers need social and relational supports and resources. A school-wide literacy plan would tackle these significant, school-specific professional development needs.

## College and/or Career Readiness

Another obstacle a literacy plan should address is the changing demands of literacy instruction or what it means to be college- and/or career-ready. Adolescents today are not being adequately prepared for the demands of 21st-century citizenship and employment. The challenges these underprepared students face are well-documented: unemployment, lower income levels and dependence on government programs for a minimal standard of living (Carnegie Council, 2010). Lawrence K. Jones of The Career Key (1996) identifies 17 foundational skills that all workers in the 21st century will need: reading, writing, mathematics, speaking, listening, creative thinking, problem-solving, decision making, visualization, social skills, negotiation, leadership, teamwork, cultural sensitivity, self-esteem, self-management and responsibility. These new basics reflect traditional literacy, but extend into the areas of “critical thinking, hypothesis-testing, effective oral and written communication and the mastery of new technologies” (Carnegie Council, 2010). However, research shows that only 60 percent of high school graduates have the literacy skills employers seek (Title I, 2009). “The fastest-growing professions have far greater than average literacy demands, while the fastest-declining professions have lower than average literacy demands” (Title I, 2009).



The academic demands of college-readiness are even more advanced. One critical need is proficiency in writing. David Conley (2007) argues that it may be by far the single academic skill most closely correlated with success, as it is the means by which college students are evaluated in nearly every postsecondary course. Yet, writing is practically absent from many elementary, middle and high schools in Kentucky. Research findings describe college courses where students are required to independently read eight to ten books in the same time that a high school class would read one or two (Standards for Success, 2003). In these college classes, students also write multiple papers that must be well-reasoned, well-organized and well-documented with evidence from trustworthy sources in short periods of time (Conley, 2007). In addition, he describes “a range of cognitive and metacognitive capabilities, often described as ‘habits of mind,’ [that] have been consistently and emphatically identified by those who teach entry-level college courses” as critical to success (Conley, 2007). Successful college students must demonstrate certain attitudes and behaviors, like “study skills, time management, awareness of one’s performance, persistence and the ability to utilize study groups” (Conley, 2007). They are expected to infer, interpret, analyze conflicting phenomena, support arguments, solve problems with no apparent solutions, engage in exchange of ideas and think deeply about what they are being taught (National Research Council, 2002). Basically, college courses demand finely tuned literacy skills: reading, writing, researching, communicating and thinking (Conley, 2007).

Many of our students do not enter college with a work ethic or the necessary skills that prepare them for instructor expectations or course requirements (Conley, 2007). Students become frustrated and even humiliated during their first year, and many decide that college is not the place for them. “According to federal statistics, just over half of students seeking bachelor’s degrees beginning in 1995-96 had attained that degree from that institution six years later” (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). To help prevent failed attempts and increased college dropout rates, the most important step our schools can take is create a systemic school-wide culture focused on intellectual and literacy development for all.

## Goals of Literacy Planning

In 2008, the Kentucky General Assembly proposed a joint resolution requiring the Kentucky Department of Education and other identified partners to develop a cohesive and comprehensive statewide literacy plan. The stated goals of the plan were to build instructional and leadership capacity; sustain continuous improvements in literacy, especially adolescent literacy; and identify policies and practices to improve the literacy of the Commonwealth’s children.

*Read to Succeed: Kentucky’s Literacy Plan* (Kentucky Literacy Partnership, 2002) outlined eight Conditions of Literacy Success:

1. supportive, participating families that value literacy
2. early diagnosis and evaluation with appropriate individual intervention for students who struggle with literacy at all levels
3. content-area reading and writing instruction in all academic areas
4. acknowledgement and ownership by communities of the importance of reading and writing that leads to literacy attainment as a means to improve the quality of life
5. adequate time devoted directly to the teaching of reading and writing
6. engaging instruction in a supportive environment that will motivate students to achieve and to value education
7. well-prepared and supported teachers at all levels who have a deep understanding and knowledge of the latest research and processes needed to teach students to read and write in all content areas
8. leadership and policy direction at all levels that support reading and writing and lead to high literacy attainment for all Kentuckians

*“According to federal statistics, just over half of students seeking bachelor’s degrees beginning in 1995-96 had attained that degree from that institution six years later”*

National Center for Education Statistics, 2003

Additionally, the associated analysis of high-performing schools found that each school's comprehensive improvement plan included an emphasis on professional development related to literacy instruction and the use of literacy strategies across content areas. Low-performing schools showed no such systemic emphasis on the development of high-quality instruction and student attainment in literacy. In keeping with these findings and conditions, it is our recommendation that all schools in Kentucky develop effective school-wide literacy plans that address these and other self-determined priorities.

## Instructional and Leadership Capacity

A school-wide literacy plan must be spearheaded by a principal and team of school literacy leaders who actively promote and become the vehicle for change. "These 'new' instructional leaders are 'lead learners': They actually participate in professional development alongside teachers, and then provide follow-up sessions to direct the implementation and integration of new ideas in the building. They maintain the focus on collaborative time spent in teaching and learning (rather than on policies and procedures). They work to develop and distribute leadership responsibility within the whole school community. They create professional learning communities – where adults have regular time to meet and discuss teaching and learning, and where adults read to learn. They use data to inform their decisions, and they share that data with stakeholders both inside and outside the building. Finally, they use school-level resources (people, time, and money) creatively (King, 2002)" (Walpole and McKenna, 2004; Carnegie Council, 2010). Effective Literacy Leadership Team members:

- collaborate and have meaningful voice and responsibility;
- follow through with common decisions around the implementation of the working literacy action plan;
- honor and share (through faculty meetings, parent meetings, newsletters, e-mail and postings on a team bulletin board) the team's work with all stakeholders;
- wisely plan and pace the work; stay motivated and energized by celebrating and recognizing the efforts, commitment and accomplishments of their team (Bedenbaugh, et. al., 2007).



Some school leaders are unsure about how to get everyone in their school on board and ensure that the literacy improvement effort is successful. Research shows that successful schools are more likely to have principals with a deep knowledge of instruction (Walpole and McKenna, 2004); additionally, Neufeld and Roper (2003) found that literacy coaching has great potential for improving instruction and subsequently, student achievement (Peterson, et. al. 2009). An easy exchange of ideas and expertise establishes a climate for change and improvement; however, many schools need to develop this type of broad and strong leadership capacity and instructional support. U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan recommends that schools think "large scale and long term" by investing in "super-training" for teachers and school leaders, thus building "human capital and capacity" (Gibbs, 2009). Research shows that it is primarily the long-term efforts of the Literacy Leadership Team, as it facilitates the goals of the school-wide literacy plan, that shift schools forward in sustainable and measureable literacy attainment (Bedenbaugh, et. al., 2007).

As "environment, engagement, expectations, and encouragement" critically influence a teacher's motivation to implement and refine literacy instruction, clear expectations from the principal and the Literacy Leadership Team are needed. In addition, teachers need a broadened definition of literacy, excellent professional learning opportunities and a shared ownership of the literacy plan goals (Meltzer & Ziemba, 2006). The role of the Literacy Leadership Team is critical to the successful school-wide implementation of the literacy plan. Teachers need to see how literacy is central to their interests or goals as teachers. They need to feel comfortable and supported enough to try new instructional strategies and be willing to persevere when their first attempts fail or are more difficult than they expected. "Some teachers will initially give only lip-service to a literacy initiative" (Meltzer & Ziemba, 2006). When teacher buy-in is inconsistent, morale quickly declines. During these times, unflappable instructional and leadership capacity provides the structure needed to ensure that all stakeholders uphold the common agreements of the school-wide literacy plan.

## Sustain continuous improvements in literacy

Research indicates that struggling students can become capable and focused when schools “concentrate their thought, energy, and effort on improving literacy,” which means making it the priority for all staff (Deshler & Kennedy, 2009). Continuous, significant progress is within reach, and it is incumbent upon schools to deliver it. Despite an increasing research base and considerable financial investments by local, state and federal entities, significant gains in literacy and content learning, especially for adolescents, are not being made. Irvin, Meltzer and Dukes (2007) contend that the first step in a literacy improvement effort must be for school staff to become more knowledgeable about literacy learning (a process they call “conceptual knowledge”), and high-quality instructional support for literacy (“pedagogical knowledge”). In general, we know that struggling students improve only when teachers recognize their needs and support their progress and when they believe that what they are learning will be useful in life (Education Commission of the States, 2009). To provide for these necessities, teachers must work together to create a school-wide literacy vision ... “a consensus on a definition of literacy” and reach agreement on what it means for every student to have “adequate reading and writing opportunities and instruction in every class,” every day (Meltzer & Ziemba, 2006). Teachers must recognize the literacy demands of their own content areas and understand methods for teaching their students to meet the demands of state standards, such as “reading like historians, writing like scientists, and thinking like mathematicians” (Gibbs, 2009).

Literacy plans might identify and target effective, mutually agreed-upon literacy and learning strategies that teachers are not using to help move students forward. Teachers could be asked to learn and practice a set of four to six common strategies each year to promote “consistent, frequent emphasis across content areas” (Meltzer & Ziemba, 2006). Again, leadership practices are key for successful implementation, as they seem to make the difference between initiatives that are successful and ones which are marginally successful to unsuccessful. Leadership teams must find ways to facilitate the incorporation of literacy skills into the “fabric of teaching and learning across the content areas” (Irvin, Meltzer & Dukes, 2007).

## Identify policies and practices to improve the literacy of the Commonwealth’s children

“Without the coordinated framework a school-wide literacy plan provides, some or many of the critical components of a comprehensive program recommended by ... experts could be lost or neglected. Through a school’s literacy team and literacy plan, the process of developing priorities with potential to motivate significant and lasting change around specific student achievement concerns is possible” (Bedenbaugh, et. al, 2007). The key to successful implementation of a literacy plan is to stay focused on student learning and achievement and to avoid becoming sidetracked by other, albeit important, school priorities (Bedenbaugh, et. al. 2007). Secondary schools in particular can fall prey to this trap, as they are made of “fundamentally different and often incongruous parts” (Deshler & Kennedy, 2009). It is crucial that the staff come together around a common vision and shared literacy goals. This will require that a faculty slow down and really study their concerns, thus enhancing their ability to devise an effective course of action. “Ellen Ferrance (2000) calls this ‘problem-solving, not the sense of trying to find out what is wrong, but rather a quest for knowledge about how to improve’” (Bedenbaugh, et. al. 2007). For example, we know that secondary schools in particular should pay attention to student indicators, such as attendance, grades and behavior, as these can indicate that a student is becoming “off track,” and his literacy attainment could be delayed or interrupted (Education Commission of the States, 2009). In addition, schools should develop “early warning mechanisms, calibrate ... indicators to local data, [and] provide targeted and intensive academic support” for students at risk (Education Commission of the States, 2009).



Some practices are specifically focused around age-appropriate literacy instruction. For example, the Carnegie Corporation report (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004) and the ACT (2006) suggest “inclusion of continuing instruction in vocabulary, a rich writing program, reading in a range of fiction and nonfiction materials and instruction in a variety of study strategies” and a rich literacy program (Graves & Liang, 2008). Additionally, Graves and Liang (2008) recommend “fostering learning from text, nurturing response to literature, teaching comprehension strategies, [and] promoting higher-order thinking.” Creating an intense intellectual climate in a school is almost completely within the control of the school teachers and administrators, and it is a central element in literacy development and college and career readiness (Conley, 2007). Teachers should purposefully teach exploration of topics through sound strategy and methodology, conducting research around a range of questions, time management, literacy and study skills, and sequence them in such a way that they develop from year to year – a program of study designed so that students “cannot make bad decisions” (Conley, 2007). Deshler and Kennedy (2009) contend that the schools that show greatest gains in student achievement are those that:

- “have an unrelenting uncompromising focus on quality instruction;
- detail specific protocols for describing, observing, analyzing and talking about instruction;
- insist on transparency of practice and results; and
- provide coaching and other instructional support to teachers” (Bedenbaugh, et. al, 2007).

## District and State Roles

Although isolated instances of successful change are occurring, these models are not likely to “produce deep change in the culture of learning” without systemic support from district- and state-level administration (Fullan, et. al., 2001). To get sustainable improvement at the school level, we must establish and coordinate accountability and capacity-building at the school, district and state levels simultaneously. Districts must increase capacity for improvement for the schools they shepherd. First of all, they must recognize the states’ position that literacy is a lifelong endeavor and mobilize community resources and partnerships to address the developmental needs of children before they enter kindergarten. Additionally, they must recognize literacy as the essential foundational skill for learning in all content areas and establish literacy instruction as the priority; they must directly invest



in leadership development at the school level; they must coordinate and feature learning across schools and make use of community and business partners and resources; and they must inventory and revise district literacy initiatives toward greater coherence and connectivity. Further, they must courageously acknowledge poor performance and seek solutions for it; they must articulate curricular content and provide instructional support; they must base decisions on multiple sources of data (i.e. formative academic assessments, attendance rates, suspension rates, satisfaction ratings, school climate surveys, student and staff perceptions of school safety), not instinct (Togneri, 2003); they must redefine leadership roles; and they must commit to sustained reform over the long haul (Togneri, 2003). Districts should resist “top-down” approaches to reform at the expense of school-level flexibility; instead,

schools should be self-determining in hiring of teachers, use of funds and the structuring of time and staff as required by their school-wide plan. Rather, districts should provide principles for professional learning; networking of instructional support and personnel; support systems for inexperienced or struggling teachers; and encouragement and training in “assessment literacy” or the use of data (Togneri, 2003). Additionally, districts should promote and share model schools where literacy teams create staffing and scheduling structures to facilitate collaboration and positive instructional change.

Case studies show that the state also must support successful literacy reform efforts through a “sophisticated blend of pressure and support” (Fullan, et. al, 2001). According to *Time to Act*, a report from the Carnegie Council on advancing adolescent literacy (2010), states can help promote a comprehensive approach to literacy development by requiring their school districts to create kindergarten through 12th-grade literacy plans that include professional development, materials, assessments, interventions and other key elements of high-quality literacy instruction. In addition, they should model the development of such plans with the creation of state-wide literacy plans that are carefully aligned to trustworthy standards (i.e. International Reading Association, America Diploma Project) and are widely disseminated among stakeholders. Policies should push forward the generic infrastructure of schools and districts to create professional opportunities that “mobilize and engage teachers, parents, business, and community leaders in the services of student learning” (Fullan, et. al., 2001). Current federal legislation acknowledges the need for a systematic plan at the national, state and local levels (Title I, 2009) and calls for alignment of the nation’s literacy plan with state and local district and school literacy plans, including the development of instructional leaders; best practice in

instruction; high-quality professional development; improved acquisition and application of community resources; and localized, strategic assistance for struggling students and teachers. Kentucky has been proactive in developing a statewide birth-12th grade plan. Unfortunately, clear evidence that tight coordination of literacy improvement efforts exists among schools, districts and states nationwide is atypical or nonexistent. Nonetheless, education experts continue to maintain that policy makers should turn their attention to “developing capacities and interactions across the three levels if they are seeking large scale, sustainable reform” (Fullan, et. al, 2001) and acknowledge that all stakeholders in the system need to be part of the solution (Togneri, 2003). “To stop the seemingly endless cycle of failed reform in America’s schools, we must re-engineer the schooling experience ... But achieving this goal on a nationwide level will require shifting from a partial and haphazard to a systemic an integrated approach” (Carnegie Council, 2010).

## Recommendation

KRS 158.6453 calls for Kentucky to move toward such a coordinated system. School-wide literacy plans, supported by district and state policy, would complement the important goals of Senate Bill 1: strong emphasis on sustained school-wide writing and literacy attainment; program reviews; analysis of multiple data sources; reduction of college remediation rates; focus on highly effective instructional practice; and development of effective leadership and school support through targeted professional development. Teacher-leaders are our “greatest resource for educational reform” (Carnegie Council, 2010). Principal Carol Hansen of the Duncan Polytechnical High School in Fresno, California (winner of the NASSP’s Breakthrough High School Award), believes that the people closest to the issues and challenges should

be the ones who make decisions about how to solve them. This means that school-based literacy teams are best suited to make collaborative decisions about such issues from the school schedule to the development of a highly effective instructional program. Additionally, school-wide literacy plans would promote sustained literacy attainment for all students in all schools, rather than “episodic spasms” of local reform (Fullan, et. al, 2001). Therefore, it is our recommendation that every Kentucky school be required to establish a literacy team and develop and implement an ongoing school-wide literacy plan, beginning with the 2011-12 school year.



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